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FM AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9606  
INFO RUEHAE/AMEMBASSY ASMARA 2134  
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RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 7259  
RUEHC/DEPT OF INTERIOR WASHDC  
RUEHRC/DEPT OF AGRICULTURE WASHDC  
RHMFIUU/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL//CCJ2/CCJ5/CCJS//  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC  
RHMFISS/CJTF HOA  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

UNCLAS ADDIS ABABA 000413

SIPDIS

STATE DEPARTMENT FOR A/S FRAZER, DAS AF JSWAN, AF/E, AF/PDPA, OES,  
A/S PRM SAUERBREY, AND PRM/AFR  
AFR/AA KALMQUIST, WWARREN, JBORNS, KNELSON, CTHOMPSON  
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LONDON, PARIS, ROME FOR AFRICA WATCHER  
CJTF-HOA AND USCENTCOM FOR POLAD  
USDA/FAS FOR U/S PENN, RTILSWORTH, AND LPANASUK  
NAIROBI FOR OFDA/ECARO GPLATT, RFFPO NCOX, USAID/EA  
ROME FOR AMBASSADOR, OHA, HSPANOS  
BRUSSELS FOR USEU PBROWN  
GENEVA FOR NKYLOH, RMA  
USUN FOR FSHANKS  
NSC FOR PMARCHAN

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ADDIS 0381

SUBJECT: USG HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TEAM: ACCESS AND SECURITY  
UPDATE #4

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SUMMARY  
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11. (SBU) Between December 20 and January 31, U.S. Government (USG) Humanitarian Assistance Team (HAT) in Ethiopia staff conducted three extensive humanitarian assessment trips to the conflict-affected areas of Somali Region, including Degehabur, Fik, Gode, and Korahe zones. USG HAT staff note national, regional, and local government cooperation in facilitating USG HAT access and travel in the region.

During USG HAT regional assessments, local populations reported numerous unsolicited accounts of Ethiopia National Defense Force (ENDF) attacks on civilian populations and burning of villages. While assessing locust damage in Korahe Zone, USG HAT observed two burned villages approximately 50 kilometers (km) northeast of Kebridehar town. USG HAT staff also note high levels of tension and intimidation in the region.

12. (U) In addition, USG HAT staff report a deterioration in safety and security conditions for UN agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating in Somali Region in recent weeks, including ENDF arrests and detentions of humanitarian staff and increasing allegations by the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (GFRDE) of humanitarian organizations collaborating with the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF). At

the same time, the ONLF released a January 18 statement accusing UN and humanitarian organizations of colluding with the GFDRE and compromising their neutrality by adhering to GFDRE required military escorts for food assistance and failing to publicly acknowledge ENDF responsibility for the current humanitarian situation. End summary.

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BURNED VILLAGES, IDPS, AND IMPLIED THREATS  
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13. (SBU) During USG HAT field assessments in Degehabur, Fik, Gode, and Korahe zones, local populations reported numerous unsolicited accounts of ENDF attacks on civilian populations, including the burning of villages and killing of civilians. In an IDP camp approximately 7 km outside of Kebridehar town, Korahe Zone, USG HAT staff heard approximately 10 accounts of nearby villages being burned and villagers fleeing into the bush or to the IDP camp. At the same camp, four unknown young men aggressively harassed the USG HAT safety and security officer (SSO). The young men approached the USG HAT SSO while making hand gestures indicating slitting one's throat. One young man pulled out a cigarette lighter, put the lighter close to the USG HAT SSO's face, lit it, and laughed. Although the USG HAT SSO could not confirm the identity of the men, the SSO noted that other IDPs avoided the young men. Based on the men's attire and aggressive attitude, the men did not appear to belong to the camp. To avoid an escalation in tensions, USG HAT staff departed the IDP camp following the incident. Continuing northeast from the IDP camp, USG HAT staff observed two burned villages approximately 50 km northeast of Kebridehar town while assessing signs of locust damage in the region. According to a UN staff member, the ENDF had burned the villages approximately four to six months prior.

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ONLF COMMUNIQUE  
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14. (U) On January 18, the ONLF issued an official communique accusing UN and humanitarian organizations of "colluding" with the GFDRE and compromising their neutrality by adhering to GFDRE required military escorts for food assistance and failing to publicly acknowledge ENDF responsibility for the current humanitarian situation. USG HAT staff note that the communique represents a change in perception of the humanitarian community by the ONLF and should be regarded as a potential threat to humanitarian activities in the region.

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HUMANITARIAN DETENTIONS AND REDUCED ACCESS IN THE OGADEN  
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15. (U) The UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS), WFP, and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) report an increase in GFDRE arrests of humanitarian staff perceived to be assisting the ONLF in recent weeks. Since January 26, 22 Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) staff continue to be affected by recent GFDRE detentions and movement restrictions within the conflict-affected areas of Somali Region, including 10 international and 12 Ethiopian staff. On January 26, the ENDF placed 16 MSF/Holland staff under open arrest and confiscated staff phones and computers in Warder town, Warder Zone, according to OCHA. Conditions of open arrest permit free movement within Warder town. However individuals are not permitted to leave Warder town, speak to UN staff, or enter UN offices, according to OCHA. According to MSF/Holland, a National Information and Security Services official told MSF/Holland staff that they were under investigation for allegedly having contacted and provided medical assistance to ONLF elements. On January 27, the ENDF also placed six MSF/Switzerland staff under open arrest and confiscated staff phones and computers in Kebridehar town, Korahe Zone, according to OCHA.

16. (U) In addition to humanitarian staff detentions, USG HAT staff report increased restrictions on humanitarian access and movement in parts of Somali Region in recent weeks. On January 29, the ENDF stopped and detained WFP and NGO staff at checkpoints in Degehabur

and Korahe zones for approximately one hour before permitting staff to continue onward travel, according to WFP. From January 29 to 31, ENDF restrictions suspended UN and NGO operations and movement in Kebridehar town, Korahe Zone. On January 29, the ENDF ordered all UN and NGO vehicles in Kebridehar town, Korahe Zone, to be moved to the ENDF compound for an unspecified period of time, according to UNDSS. UN agencies refused to comply and negotiated an agreement to store vehicles in UN and NGO compounds and temporarily suspend operations, according to OCHA.

17. (U) OCHA has characterized recent incidents as blatant military harassment and intimidation and cautions that humanitarian operations cannot continue under current conditions. In a January 31 OCHA Somali Region coordination meeting, OCHA reported that the Humanitarian Coordinator has raised renewed protection and ENDF

humanitarian harassment concerns with the UN headquarters in New York and that the UN Secretary General is expected to raise these concerns with Prime Minister Meles.

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USG HAT PROPOSED PRESENCE IN KEBRIDEHAR  
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18. (U) The USG HAT is proposing to establish a temporary field presence in Somali Region to continue to evaluate humanitarian conditions, implement and manage U.S. emergency response programs, and facilitate coordination and information sharing with UN and NGO partners operating in the region. Office space would be co-located within the UN compound in Kebridehar town, Korahe Zone, and be utilized as a base for short-term assessment teams traveling to the region.

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USG HAT CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS  
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19. (U) Due to continuing insecurity and an upsurge in recent humanitarian staff detentions and movement restrictions in Somali Region, USG HAT staff emphasize the need for continued collaboration and information sharing between USG HAT staff, the U.S. Embassy Resident Security Officer (RSO), and UNDSS, WFP, and NGO security staff. USG HAT staff recommend that future USG HAT travel in the region utilize air travel whenever possible, continue to utilize UN and NGO partner vehicles and support, and secure RSO advance approval, in addition to UNDSS clearance when applicable. Regarding the establishment of a USG HAT presence in Kebridehar, USG HAT staff emphasize that the proposed office space is to be utilized as a temporary base for short-term assessments to the region. USG HAT staff also encourage USAID's Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance (DCHA) to communicate concerns regarding recent humanitarian harassment and movement restrictions to UN leadership.

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